

**TOP FY 2000
Project Narrative**

Metro Nashville-Davidson County

**Grant # 47-60-00006
Nashville, TN**

1. Project Purpose

A. Problem to be addressed

Community groups in Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County (Metro) have often been left out of the public process. Land use and development trends have been driven primarily by developers and other business interests, not residents. The public has little significant input into Police operations. The following factors have created barriers to effective public participation:

- *Public information is not easily accessible.* Obtaining information can be a lengthy process. Community groups often do not know where to obtain public information: there is no central Metro administrative center, offices are spread throughout the county. In a municipality over 500 square miles in area, this not only confuses and frustrates residents, but results in great travel distances which must be made by automobile. Furthermore, the heavy workload of Metro staff delays response time to citizen requests for public information. Without this information, residents cannot make informed decisions about public policy.
- *Community groups often do not know how to most effectively use the information.* Although many citizens have a clear conception of what they want their community to be, without a solid understanding of how the local government bureaucracy operates and access to critical information, they cannot effectively influence policy decisions that shape their environment.
- *Current public notification practices are not sufficient.* Many residents and neighborhood groups complain that they are unaware of zone changes, plan amendments, and development proposals until *after* it is too late to participate in the decision-making process.

B. Background

Metro Nashville-Davidson County is a growing and diverse community that faces both challenges and opportunities for improving public participation. In 1963 the county, town, and city governments within Davidson County became one of the first consolidated metropolitan governments in the United States. As such, the local government embraces rural, suburban, and urban communities in a 533 square mile area. The confluence of three major interstate highways and the county's central location have fostered a strong economy with an unemployment rate under three percent. Middle Tennessee has therefore experienced a tremendous influx of residents from other parts of the United States and the world, and is becoming an increasingly international city. Growing numbers of Hispanic, Asian, African, and Eastern European immigrants are contributing to Nashville's vitality and diversity (*See Appendices A and D.*)

C. Network Solutions: Make Metro Government accessible to the public through the Internet

1. Public Notice in an accessible, interactive, visual, geographic format

Citizens must be aware of proposed zoning changes, plan changes, subdivision proposals, infrastructure improvements, and public hearings if they are to have input. Using current GIS ArcView technology, the Planning Department can place interactive maps on the Internet that allow citizens to search development proposals in their neighborhood, giving them time to prepare for Planning Commission or Metro Council hearings. Using this system, community groups can track items through the legislative process and better understand how their local government operates.

2. Public information in an accessible, interactive, visual, geographic format

Citizens must be well informed in order to influence public policy and achieve the results they desire. The Planning and Police Departments, as well as the Neighborhoods Resource Center, currently administer a wealth of data in ArcView. This can be adapted to a user-friendly Internet format. Citizens will be able to search the information by neighborhood, census tract, and individual property. One of the most important features of this information is that it will be accessible to non-English speaking residents by using software that will translate each page in the language requested by the user. *(See Appendix H for more on translation software.)*

Information that will be made available on-line includes:

- Crime Data (criminal offenses, recovered guns, prison releases, traffic accidents)
- Land Data (floodplain, floodway, topography)
- Property Data (historic properties & districts, vacant land, appraisal & sale values)
- Development Data (building & rehab permits, zone changes, PUDs, subdivisions)
- Transportation Data (Major Street Plan, public transportation, Collector Street Plan)
- 1999 Demographic Data (race, income, educational attainment, age)
- Plans (Comprehensive, Subarea, Business District, Neighborhood plans)
- Neighborhood Resources (Neighborhood boundaries, contact information, Neighborhood Notifier, community-based social services)

3. Participatory Urban Design & Direct Input to Metro Government

Once citizens are aware of the local government process and informed about current trends and issues, they are ready to provide meaningful, direct input to government officials. Innovations in network technology make direct on-line communication with the appropriate Metro official efficient and effective. On-line communication will also provide a more detailed record of contact between citizens and local government staff.

Visual Preference Survey and other photorealistic visualization tools are being used by the Planning Department to conduct community meetings to determine what streetscape or development designs are preferred by residents. They are able to view a range of images depicting what a site looks like now, and alternatives for what it can become. The Designing a Community On-line project will put VPS on the Internet, allow residents to register their name and address with the Planning Department, and vote on their preferred land use or design alternative. This input will be received by designated planning staff and incorporated into planning decisions. *(See Appendix G for more details about VPS software.)*

Interactive maps showing the sites of Planning Commission agenda items, such as zone changes, city projects, and subdivision proposals, and available research materials to make informed choices offer the public a forum to enter official public comment on-line. Their comments will be received by designated planning staff and incorporated into land use decisions. The Planning Department can administer surveys of neighborhood organizations and individual residents to determine what issues are the most important, and where Metro can improve the delivery of public services. This technology will also be adapted for use by the Police Department. Residents will be able to request traffic radar during the day of the week and time of day of the greatest number of violations. Furthermore, community members will be able to report drug and vice activity directly and anonymously to Police officers.

4. Provide neighborhoods access to computers and the Internet

The Neighborhoods Resource Center and the Global Center serve the neighborhoods of Nashville, focusing their efforts primarily in the older center city neighborhoods and ethnically diverse communities. They provide referrals and technical assistance to the most disadvantaged and underrepresented Metro residents, including low income, elderly, ethnically diverse, and immigrant households. Realizing that these residents tend to have less access to computers and the Internet, both at home and at work, than other populations, the Neighborhoods Resource Center and the Global Center will deploy new computer terminals with Internet capabilities to 53 registered neighborhood and ethnic-based community organizations most in need. Need will be determined by these two organizations based on neighborhood income, ethnic composition, and current access to computer technology. The Police Department will distribute an additional 22 computer terminals with Internet access to Neighborhood Watch organizations in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. These computers will be managed by Administrative Sergeants.

5. Train neighborhood leaders to use the system to advocate for their community

The Planning and Police Departments will partner with Neighborhoods Resource Center and Global Center to train neighborhood organization leaders and community group staff and volunteers. Neighborhood leaders will be trained in computer basics and in teaching others how to use the Internet features, including navigating our web site and using email. An important component is training neighborhood leaders how the public process works so that they can intervene/lobby/plan on behalf of their community and make the most of the available information. This will be accomplished through the Neighborhoods Resource Center's Leadership Training Institute in collaboration with other partners.

After these leaders have received training and gained experience, they can serve as mentors to other neighborhood and community groups. The Metro Planning Department is already partnering with the Neighborhoods Resource Center, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods, and the Metropolitan Housing & Development Agency to train neighborhood groups in conducting neighborhood planning. *(See Appendix C for additional training information.)*

D. Project Outcomes

Neighborhoods are the building blocks of the city. Through our partnership, this project is a way to bring neighborhood groups together as people learn more about their own community and engage them in constructive dialog with Metro departments, while re-engaging citizens in public policy decision-making. In addition, neighbors learn what is happening in other neighborhoods and how some issues affect everyone in our city. The Designing a Community On-line project creates a formal partnership that focuses on sharing resources to broaden the availability of information while avoiding a duplication of efforts.

This project trains and engages citizens in utilizing technology as an on-going resource. There will be more computers available to the community and people will be trained in using them, thus reducing the technology gap in Nashville. The neighborhood and community groups will use this information to continue to set their own priorities and engage in planning and implementing a community vision.

Meaningful citizen involvement in Metro government will be increased. Residents will also be able to give public comment on-line and further increase their voice in government decisions. These more informed citizen planners will better understand our local government system and how our city functions. This project also will enable Metro government to be more responsive and supportive of citizen involvement. It is our hope that these people will become more active in city politics and government and even serve as elected officials.

Three major documents that will help residents in neighborhood problem solving will be placed on-line. Using the translation software, these documents will be translated into various languages in order to reach more people. The Planning Department along with the Office of Neighborhoods, the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance, and the Neighborhoods Resource Center are developing a Handbook to Metro Services, that will be a valuable tool to citizens in describing the role of each Metro department and who to contact. The Global Center has developed an International Directory for ethnic-based community groups, and the Council of Community Services Directory provides assistance with social services, including services for youth and the elderly.

6. Innovation

A. Innovative Characteristics

Innovations in the Designing a Community On-line project transform the way residents and community groups interact with local government. The Planning and Police Departments are dedicated to partnering with the community and ensuring that residents have an active voice in local government decisions. We will use the Internet as a tool to reach the public and gain community input into policy choices. This will be accomplished through ensuring advance public notice on critical planning issues, offering comprehensive research materials, and requesting direct on-line feedback from residents and neighborhood groups. The convenience to Metro residents will be improved by having all the necessary information in one place. The computers and Internet access this project provides to disadvantaged community organizations go beyond enabling neighborhood groups to participate. It provides an incentive to organize and become involved in the decision-making process.

The Designing a Community On-line project partnership is itself an innovation. This project recognizes the benefits of multiple government departments, in this case the Planning and Police Departments, collaborating with private sector organizations to solve community problems. This project is also unique in that local government is sharing power with non-profit community groups in program design and implementation.

G. Technology innovations that can be shared with other organizations

Many project aspects are relevant to advocates of public participation throughout the nation:

- *Translation software:* Ensuring multi-lingual public access to information is important to every community with Non-English speaking populations.
- *Photorealistic visualization tools:* Software used in Visual Preference Surveys can be applied to any situation in which the community has a choice in the development of their built environment.
- *GIS & the Internet:* GIS is becoming a requirement for local governments. This project shows how computer mapping on the Internet can be made easy for people who are not computer experts. This tool gives residents access to a wealth of information that they can customize to fit their specific needs in a way that does not overburden local government staff.
- *Internet public comment:* This project is an example of how to manage voting or other input from an Internet site. Local governments will find this system useful as e-government becomes more common throughout the country.

C. Building on lessons from existing projects

The Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles Project, funded through TIIAP in 1998, provided on-line property data and showed the value of integrating data sets and allowing interactive queries. The SAVI Community Connections Project, funded through TIIAP in 1999, advanced this model by adding mapping and spatial analysis tools. Designing a Community On-line will provide similar on-line data and mapping resources, but will extend services to include planning and visualization tools, public comment on planning agenda items, and multilingual on-line translation. Because Metro government currently has most of the necessary network architecture in place, resources can be focused on enhancing citizen input into public decisions.

3. Diffusion Potential

Metro experiences many needs faced by other local governments: enhancing public participation, providing public information, and maintaining manageable staff workloads. A strong city must have strong community participation. A project such as this, which makes government accessible to residents, will encourage even the people who have been turned off from the public process in the past, to again participate.

This project will be a model for municipalities that want to ensure citizens have access to more types of information, without overwhelming staff with data and map requests. This becomes more important with the growing sophistication and demands of community advocacy groups. In Metro, as in other jurisdictions, the population continues to grow, but department staff and budgets do not. Interactive Internet research capabilities maximize local government resources.

Designing a Community On-line partners will evaluate and publish the results of the project. In the third year of the project, the partners will submit project findings to the national American Planning Association Conference and the international Making Cities Livable Conference, and to journals such as the *Journal of the American Planning Association* and *ArcNews*. Throughout the process we will be willing to share our progress reports with other interested local governments, community organizations, and neighborhood groups.

5. Feasibility

A. Technical approach

Through the integration of World Wide Web, GIS, database, translation, and photorealistic imaging technology, we will develop a user-friendly system capable of serving a growing number of people and conducting complex searches. Citizen planners will be able to query dynamic data and perform interactive operations. The system will make the most efficient use of Metro computer networks while accommodating a growing number of users. *(See Appendix E.)* User load will be distributed across five existing servers, with the need for one additional server.

75 Dell computers will be used to link designated community organizations to the Internet. Each community access site will be provided web server and email access. Computer workstations and technical support will be purchased through a special agreement with Dell Computers (Dell is currently building a massive manufacturing and technical support facility in Nashville). Metro government currently houses 3 Internet map servers, a web server, and a Windows NT server. The new Planning Department web interface, residing on the map server, will be accessed through the web server. Data will be channeled through the web server to meet user requests. Metro government will maintain the system.

Software & Standards Used in Program Development (See additional details in Appendix F):

- **VisualBasic 6.0** is the most productive tool for creating high-performance, highly interactive Web-based applications. It will be used to create on-line GIS and data query applications.
- **SYSTRAN Enterprise**, the most effective Internet translation software currently on the market, will translate up to 8 languages, and can be customized to adapt planning terms.
- **Extenses Intellihance 4.0** streamlines image enhancement and color correction to make it easy to make images look their best. Intellihance provides an intuitive interface, high-quality presets, and scalable approach for all levels of expertise.
- Industry standard Environmental System Research Institute's (ESRI) **MapObjects** Internet Map Server will be used to implement GIS functionality.
- Metro uses industry standard **IBM DB2** technology to provide client/server database architecture.
- The proposed model uses **TCP/IP networking and client/server architecture** in all aspects of the model, allowing it to be interoperable with any TCP/IP networking system incorporating client server architecture.

G. Project Partners

The Metro Planning Department will be responsible for managing and implementing the project, working in partnership with the Metro Police Department and the Neighborhoods Resource Center and the Global Center of the Council of Community Services. The Planning and Police Departments will ensure that the appropriate data is made available on the Internet in a user-friendly format, manage public comment that is received through the web, assist in training community leaders, and publish quarterly program reports. The Neighborhoods Resource Center and Global Center will be the liaison with community groups, prioritize which organizations receive computers, ensure effective neighborhood use of computers, partner with Planning and Police Departments to train neighborhood leaders, provide neighborhood resources data, and assist in program evaluation. In addition, these two partners will ensure significant and meaningful involvement of organization leaders in the oversight and implementation of this

project. This group of project partners has the necessary range and depth of project management, technical, and community service skills and experience. (*See Appendix B for more information on project partners.*)

- **The Metro Planning Department** provides guidance in neighborhood planning and offers information, services, support, and training to community groups.
- **The Metro Police Department** provides community-based police services, through crime prevention strategies and partnerships, to ensure a safe and peaceful Nashville.
- **The Neighborhoods Resource Center** assists neighborhood groups by providing information, leadership training, consulting and supportive services, and by forming collaborative relationships with institutions that serve neighborhoods.
- **The Global Center** offers expertise in serving Nashville's multi-lingual community and will ensure that ethnic-based community groups have a voice in program development.

Timeline	Milestones
Ongoing	Maintain on-line data, evaluation, training & support for Citizen Planners
Fall/Winter 2000-01	Maps, data, & Spanish web translation on-line, structure training program
Spring/Summer 2001	Initiate VPS on-line, 1 st 25 Dell computers, & 1 st training class
Fall/Winter 2001-02	Incorporate 2000 Census data into web site data, & preliminary evaluation
Spring/Summer 2002	Additional language web translation, 2 nd 25 computers, & 2 nd training class
Fall/Winter 2002-03	Asian language web translation, 3 rd 25 computers, & 3 rd training class
Spring 2003	Publish evaluation

Metro will continue to manage the on-line data resources beyond the end of the TOP funding.

The Neighborhoods Resource Center and Global Center will continue to provide services and technical assistance to community groups. The purchase of individual computers is a one-time expense, and community groups will provide the Internet access after the funding cycle has ended. Additional funding will be sought to acquire translation software of additional languages.

5. Community Involvement

Voices of the community, including the Neighborhoods Resource Center and the Global Center, have been clamoring for easily accessible public information for years. In some cases they have needed to duplicate research of Metro departments simply because they did not know if the needed research already existed. Each partner's representatives speak in community meetings often and one of the top concerns expressed by community groups is access to information.

Nashville's Agenda, a grassroots process that gathered thousands of Nashvillians' ideas and dreams on how we could make Nashville "the best it can be," supports creating a comprehensive database of information that citizens can access. In early 1999, a citizen focus group, comprised of diverse individuals and neighborhood leaders, further discussed the need for Metro government to provide information to everyone and ensure that the information is understandable. Both the Planning and Police Departments have asked community members what information is most valuable to them and have tried to make that information available.

The Neighborhoods Resource Center has conducted two studies over the past two years of neighborhood crime watch leaders. In both studies, the need for consistent and timely access to information was clearly stated. In addition, the Neighborhoods Resource Center hosted a meeting of neighborhood leaders from low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, who themselves defined the need to have access to information. The deployment of computers to these neighborhoods is a dream that we plan to make a reality.

This project allows all of us to make the most of our information. In the past, the Planning Department has worked with the Police Department and the Neighborhoods Resource Center to provide information and ensure that citizens are involved with Metro government in planning processes. Coordinating our efforts, instead of duplicating them, allows each of the partners to spend more time working directly with community members in accessing and using the data. The Planning Department's data is open to the public, and the Police Department's data already incorporates measures to ensure data privacy. In turn the Police Department has worked with the Global Center to include ethnic-based community groups in their work.

5. Reduce Disparities

Findings in *Falling Through the Net* describe the disparities in Internet access that exist in America. The report illustrates that the people facing the most obstacles to Internet access tend to have lower incomes, are of African-American or Hispanic ethnicity, or are over 55 years of age. While the number of residents using the Internet at home is steadily increasing, 17% of Americans use the Internet at work, school, or community centers, and 67% do not use the Internet at all. Furthermore, individuals most likely to use the Internet at work tend to have advance degrees, and earn at least \$75,000. Americans who do not have the advantages of a college education or higher income (earning less than \$20,000) are more likely to access the Internet through a public library or community center. Metro residents currently have public access to the Internet at 18 public libraries.

The methods we employ to select computer recipients target groups who have the greatest barriers to computer access. Neighborhoods need more than just access to computers, however. They must have the skills to utilize them. A comprehensive training program for community leaders is therefore an integral part of the Designing a Community On-line project. Planning Department staff will partner with staff from the Neighborhoods Resource Center and the Global Center in leading a series of computer workshops. These will be geared toward teaching future teachers. Neighborhood leaders will achieve proficiency using Windows applications and project specific Internet applications. They will then be capable of providing training and technical assistance to other interested community members.

6. Evaluation and Documentation

Progress of the Designing a Community On-line project will be documented and evaluated throughout the life of the program. The Planning Department will issue a quarterly report on the progress of the grant. These reports will include the following quantitative data:

- Number of web site users, public on-line comments, issues addressed, & training workshops
- Attendance at public meetings and training workshops

The Neighborhoods Resource Center and the Global Center will use interviews with end users and community groups to provide the following qualitative reporting:

- Level of meaningful community participation
- Impact of access to Internet translation and progress of computer training
- User-friendliness of the web site and value of the data
- Aggregated user feedback and customer evaluation

These results will be reviewed by program staff and necessary modifications will be made to web site design, the Internet user interface, and training programs. In addition to quarterly reports, we will conduct a preliminary evaluation 1-year into the implementation of the project and will publish a final report at completion of the 3-year project.